

which form the private home of the house's inhabitants.

A sort of stairway without railings or a ladder gives access to the veranda from one of the short sides of the rectangle. Often a second ladder leads to a small uncovered platform [183] situated at the other end of the house. This, so to speak, is the service stairway, for the platform serves as a kitchen or storeroom and for various private uses.

Inside the house is divided into two parts by a longitudinal partition pierced by openings which give access to compartments used as bedrooms. The corridor [Illustration here] left free between the partition and the opposite wall constitutes the common room, and is provided with one or several rectangular hearths. The floor of the verandas, the bedrooms and the common room is covered with mats.

Furnishings are generally scanty, and consist of mattresses, pillows, cushions, footstools, low stools, blankets, chests, etc.

The space under the house serves as a stable or barn for horses and livestock, a poultry house and a pigsty. The animals are shut up there each night.

[184] Looms for weaving may be found either under the veranda or underneath the house.

The storehouse for paddy is found nearby. It is also mounted on piles and may be built in a rectangular or circular shape. The "hand" or "foot" mortars used to decorticate paddy may either be near the storehouse under an addition, or else under the house.

The dimensions of houses are reckoned in Hon or units as long as the span of the arms (1.8 to two meters). Houses may be anywhere from two to eight or nine hons (4 to 20 meters) in length. Their width varies from two to three spans of the arms on the average (four to six meters), not including verandas.

Strictly speaking, the piles are columns which rise from the ground to the tie-beams of the roof trusses. Mortises are cut in them a meter of two above the ground, and the floor joists fitted into the mortises.

Even as they are, these houses resist high winds. They provide good shelter from the sun, rain, etc. and are sufficiently comfortable, even for Europeans. The latter often have to be contented with such houses and can find little fault with them except the instability of the floor and the narrowness of the windows, which makes the inside somewhat dark.

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Rice is grown in two different ways in Laos: in inundated ricefields on plains or hills, and in rais or [357] temporary mountain clearings. Only one crop is harvested per year, from November to January, since the Laotians do not practice artificial irrigation and count only on the water supplied by rain.

Maize is always grown in rais or on the edge of terraced hillside ricefields. In southern Laos only the Khas have any in their fields. The Laotians produce maize only in their gardens, as a vegetable.

Glutinous or aquatic rice grows well only on low, hot, swampy land where the soil is heavy. Dry rice, on the other hand, thrives only on ordinary soil which is moist and slightly sandy, and on heights up to an altitude of 1,800 meters where it can endure temperatures which are relatively low for tropical regions (5° and even lower).

Plains ricefields. The land in plains ricefields generally consists of soil containing a high percentage of vegetable matter. It is composed of alluvia worked by earthworms and containing organic vegetable matter in decomposition. The clayish and sandy soil is deep enough to permit growth and nourishment of the plant roots. It generally rests either on rock, or on a compact sediment or on an alluvial strata which has a higher clay content and has not been penetrated by worms. This bottom layer prevents the ground water which is indispensable to the growth of the grain from escaping.

Terraced ricefields. In the ricefields which are terraced or arranged in steps, and which are situated on hillsides or the lower slopes of the mountains which enclose high valleys, the layer of vegetable matter is fairly thin. This is due to the fact that rocky particles removed from the peaks by running water have been deposited on natural terraces where they form a kind of alluvial cone. Man's handiwork has extended and leveled them, and arranged them in such a way that the alluvia will not be carried lower. Dikes or levees of earth and stones limit the successive terraces which cover the slopes, like the steps of a gigantic stairway. They hold back the vegetable soil, and at the same time their inner faces [358] constitute the walls of irrigation canals which circulate from one step to another from the top of the hills to the bottom, diverting into the furrows, through slits which may be opened at will, the waters of a brook or torrent which has been captured at a higher level.

Rais. Rais take their name from a Siamese unit of area measurement which is applied to ricefields and which represents a square forty meters on a side, or 1,600 square meters. They are

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1. Dark in color and with a strong taste. This lot comes from the upper part of the plant and is represented by the smaller leaves, which are sweet and supple.

2. Yellowish-brown in color and with an average taste. This tobacco includes the leaves from the middle part of the plant, which are somewhat larger than the preceding but less sweet and supple.

3. Yellow in color and less strong in taste. This last sample lot is made up of the leaves from the base of the plant, which are large, somewhat thicker and rougher than the preceding.

The leaves are matched in accordance with their color, surface and thickness, and then joined in packs of ten for the first sample lot, eight for the second and five for the third. They are rolled into plugs, and the tobacco is then ready for cutting.

Cutting and packing. The cutting operation is done on a horizontal bench ending in a vertical riser. This riser is pierced by a circular hole, the diameter of which is equal to the size of the plugs to be cut.

A plug is placed on the horizontal bench and its end stuck through the hole. It can then be advanced by stages with the left hand, the size of the stages to be determined by the degree of fineness desired, which depends on the type of sample lot. (The first number is as fine as Egyptian tobacco, to give some basis for comparison.) A special knife with a thin blade which is somewhat concave on the inside and is well sharpened is maneuvered with the right hand and rubs along the riser on the outside of the hole. It cuts through the plug as the latter is advanced along the horizontal bench, cutting diagonally like the blade of a guillotine.

When cut the tobacco is in the form of a flat, thin, filamentous web, and it falls into a kind of winnowing-basket. The strips of cut tobacco are carefully collected and spread out full-length on bamboo wattles, then exposed out of doors to sun, mist and dew, both day and night. The drying operation [144] lasts five days, and during the first days the tobacco is turned over several times on the wattles.

[1804] After this treatment it is rolled into egg-shaped balls which are strongly compressed by hand and weigh from 100 to 150 grams each. It is then put into cylindrical baskets which are lined inside with dry leaves or bamboo leaflets.

Each basket contains one "min" or one-fifth of a picul (12.2 kilograms), and the tobacco is sold and exported in this form and in this kind of package.